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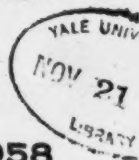
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SOCIAL GROUPINGS AMONG THE KHASIS OF ASSAM

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Introduction

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[591]
[192] THE Khasis, who inhabit the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam, are matrilineal. Like the Garos, they, are matrilocal in residence. Exclusive ownership over family property is claimed by the Khasi women and the youngest daughter (*Ka-Khadduh*) who lives permanently in the house of her mother, is the custodian of the family property and the holder of religion (*Ka bat ka-niam*)¹.

121 This paper deals with the social groupings, namely, the clan, sub-clan and family, of the Khasis. The materials were collected in 1954 from Mawphlang, Cherapunji and Mamluh and Mawsmai villages farther south of the Chera State.

Discussion

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[562]
[611] In the language of the Khasi, the prefix *Ka* is usually used before the name of a woman or any object belonging to a woman (or² considered feminine). The use of *Ka* as a prefix before the name of each social group is suggested to have bearing on Khasi matriliney. *Kur* is not a very expressive and exact term for a clan. *Kakur*, which is supposed to have sprung from the woman (*long jaid na ka kynthet*)³ is more exact. Similarly, *Ka-K'poh* and *Ka-ling* denote the sub-clan and family respectively.

¹ Gorden, P. R. T., *The Khasis*, London, 1914 p. 83.

² Op. cit., page 82.

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The primal father and the mother of the members of every clan are respectively known as *U-Parad* (*U-Thawlang*) and *Ka-Meyrad* (*Ka-Iaubei*). 614
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There is a large number of clans among the Khasis and some of the clan names are those of animals and trees. *Shriek* is monkey, *tham*, a crab, and *dingdoh*, a tree; yet they do not constitute totemic clan organization. The clan names are not even the names of the ancestress. The clans are not ancestral but rather were territorial in nature when the clansmen (*shi-Kur*) used to live in a place having a common land (*ri-kur*) and a clan ossuary (*mawbah*) where the bones of the dead clansmen were deposited. 614
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Unlike the clans, the sub-clans (*ka-k'poh*) are ancestral. As for example, in case of the *Siem* clan of the Chera state, it is found that *Ka-Khiem* was the primal ancestress. Her daughter *Ka-Pet* had three daughters, namely, *Ka-Sngi*, *Ka-Lugen*, and *Ka-Kreh* each of whom is regarded as the *Ka-K'poh* (meaning womb) of their respective descendants who are *shi-K'poh* (the members of the same womb). And their names are the names of the three sub-clans of the *siem* clan. 613

The names of the sub-clans of some of the clans as collected from the elderly Khasi women are given below. 613
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CLAN	SUB-CLAN
1. Siem	— sngi ; lugen ; kreh
2. Khongait	— yin , phai ; har ; jiram
3. Kharahling	— lew ; mah ; sayngiar , lynean
4. Lyngdoh	— kaban ; summhri ; kamai
5. Nongrum	— tungan ; tungwi ; syngaa , buhal
6. Khongrymai	— thania ; thani ; barhai , liai
7. Jaidkhar	— haai ; haza , tuli ; tula
8. Simpilian	— eil ; mayar ; joel , emi

Family (*ka-ling*) among the Khasis is the socio-economic and religious unit. Due to matrilocal residence, the structure of the Khasi families assumes a different form. The constituent members are the grandmother, her daughters and their children. But the permanent residents are the youngest daughter (*ka-khadduh*), her husband and daughters. It takes an 596

[Should read: permanent. — Analyst]

596 extended form more often when the children of the deceased sisters of *Ka-khadduh* reside there. This extension is on the mother's side and is affiliated through the extension of mother-child relationship.

Additional members like widower brothers or widowed sisters make the Khasi family a composite one.

In a Khasi family father, mother and her brother are very important. Father who is regarded as *Mynder* (stranger) or *Ushong kha* (begetter), has also the position of *Kynrad* (master) of the house (set-up by him). He is the executive head and the mother is the *de jure* owner of the household.

177 Modern conditions and spread of Christianity have greatly
178 affected the Khasi society and changed the Khasi ways of life
604 but have failed to alter the traditional mode of inheritance even
593 among the Christian Khasis. Another important fact which is
[428] apparent in the Khasi families, is the change of the status of
the mother's brother (*Ukni*) in his sister's house. His influence
has greatly been diminished due to clash with *Ka-Khadduh*
(heiress). He has almost lost his control over his sister's
[562] family. This has made the women exert their status to a
danger point. Consequently, some amount of maladjustment in
the relationship system, moral depravity and disintegration
loom large in the family horizon.

596 Family is the core of Khasi social organization and the
613 closeness of familial kin with the members of the sub-clan is
due more to the fact that sub-clan owes its development to the
family. A *Shi-K'poh* (member of sub-clan) is a secondary
relative and can easily be approached for any help.

614 The functions of the above mentioned social groupings are
as follows :

Clan (*Ka-Kur*)—It regulates marriage. It being a larger
non-residential kin group contact between
its members is infrequent. The amount of
social participation needed on certain
level to intensify the relationship among
its members falls far short of. But never-
theless, there existed among the members

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1 [Should read: regarded. — Analyst]

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of a clan some ceremonial attachment developed out of the custom of depositing the bones of the clansmen in clan ossuary and renewing the relationship between the clansmen on the ceremonial occasion of *thepmawbah* when the bones were finally transferred from *mawshieng* (ossuary of a sub-clan) to *mawbah* (ossuary of a clan). ⁶¹⁴ 764

Social bond among the clansmen is due to the performance of common religious ceremonies (*phur*), worship of common deities and spirits of household (*Ksuidnia*), water (*puri*) and hills (*Ksuidlum*) and observance of mourning for three days for the death of clansmen with the cessation of outdoor work specially with implements. ⁶¹⁴ [796] [776] [765]

Economic bond among them is due further to the possession of common land (*ri-kur*), which is divided into separate holdings held by families. [423]

Sub-clan (*Ka-N'pon*) — Unlike the clan, sub-clan has nothing to do with the regulation of marriage. ⁶¹³ Its main functions are socio-religious. Mutual interest in the welfare of the members of sub-clan evinced in the observance of *aibam** in honour of the dead grandmother, profound sentiment grown out of the former practice of depositing the bones of the dead persons of the same sub-clan in *mawshieng* and the responsibility of bearing the expenses for *thepmawbah* bind the members together. [769]

The observance of mourning on the death of a person of the same sub-clan for three days and the consequent ^[765]

*Offering of food to the spirits of the dead ancestors.

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[765]

cessation of transaction of money (*kheinsbai*) during the period, compulsory social participation in marriage, household worship, and funeral ritual, and the pride for the privilege in succession to *siem-ship* (chieftainship) hold together the inner structure of the society in fulfilling its function.

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Family (*Ka-ling*)—The functions of family centre round the :

1. performance of basic religious rites,
2. management and inheritance of family property,
3. maintenance of social relations with the kin of *ka-k'poh* and *ka-kur*,
4. protection of familial kin.

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From the above discussions it may be inferred that the social groupings of the Khasis function in different dimensions and make the individuals aware of their duties, and obligations towards each other. In the process of socialization and enculturation of the individual they learn that the individuals, the different social groups and the community at large are inseparable.

[553]

Even from infancy a boy is infused with the idea that family comes first in regard, sub-clan second, and clan third. The kin of the family are primary relatives, and those of the sub-clan and the clan are secondary and tertiary respectively. One bow and three arrows given by a father to his son in his naming ceremony (*jerkhun*) symbolise their relationships with the three social groups. With the first arrow man has to fight for *shi-ling* (members of the same family) and *shi-k'poh* (members of the same sub-clan), with the second for his *shi-kur* and with the third for the state.